

Arizona Storytellers - Summer at the Movies

Wednesday, May 18, 2016 at The Rebel Lounge in Phoenix

Mark Goldstein - A Tale of Two Mentors

I graduated high school in 1968 and went off to college that fall at State University of New York at Binghamton. I was into folk music and becoming politicized as I was quite opposed to the Vietnam War. I took to college and being away from home quite well. I began to major in experimental psychology and added philosophy as a second major, but I began to spiral down into a bout of existential angst about my place in the universe and got active in anti-war protests and some civil disobedience. It was an angry and confusing time for the disaffected youth of my era.

An English professor, had gotten into independent film making, convinced the university to let him create a new Department of Cinema, and recruited a noted New York City filmmaker, Ken Jacobs to join him in Binghamton. I was only peripherally aware of them, but asked to borrow a movie camera to take along for a March on Washington where I was marshalling and then began to become involved with the department and hooked.

In the budding department, I found a home filled with artistic intensity and intellectual honesty that I was drawn to like a moth to the flame. I started taking cinema classes and began shooting film and making shorts. We repeatedly viewed and deconstructed film classics and I learned a lot about independent and critical thinking in the process. I also honed my cinematography skills, even taking modern dance classes to learn how to move with heavy cameras balanced on my shoulder which was infinitely better being one of a few males in a class of women than taking physical classes with the boys. Ken Jacobs was a demanding and extraordinary mentor to me and we did interesting, innovative work together in 3D shadow play.

They brought many influential filmmakers from around the country to campus for artist in residence sessions. Along the way, they had Nicholas Ray visit for a week and lecture. He was a famous Hollywood filmmaker having directed "Rebel without a Cause" among his 19 commercial films often noir, full of moral ambiguity, and sympathetic to the young and

troubled. But by now, he had been out of Hollywood as a black sheep with a checkered history and some illustrious failures. He was known as a consummate outsider and visionary and had come to us directly from the student riots in Paris where the French new wave revered Nick as one of the few American "auteurs" of the cinema. François Truffaut once called him "the poet of nightfall," while Jean-Luc Godard said "the cinema is Nicholas Ray." After his brief visit, they created a teaching position for him the next school year.

But, he was a wild card, deeply flawed, and at times toxic and destructive. He involved his students as cast and crew of a personal project, a final grand film project. I became Nick's primary cameraman for some 18 months and hung out with him quite a bit, sometimes driving him into New York on errand excursions. For a shoot on his movie, we would gather after dinner, work on setup and lighting for hours, and finally usually early the next morning, we would be so worn down he could harangue what he needed from this amateur cast and crew.

Being in his entourage was a wild, exhilarating experience, with at times a real feel of danger. He had left-leaning political views, was deeply involved with the Chicago 7, and visited by famous friends such as Dennis Hopper. Nick grossly abused the resources of the state university, partied and did drugs with his students, and put his cast and crew through extreme and at times inappropriate paces. As matters between him and the other faculty and university administration came to a head, he eventually called upon me to make a choice I could not make, to take sides between him and them. When I resisted choosing, for him, that was my choice and he disavowed me, shut me out. I felt unfairly treated and was truly pissed. For me it was a bad, miserable breakup that replayed in my head for some years after.

I finished my studies and was in the second graduating class from the Department of Cinema in 1972. Nick's contract was terminated after two years, though much of his entourage stayed in his orbit and moved around with him as they sought to finish the film we had all begun. They did manage to show a rough cut of "We Can't Go Home Again" at the Cannes festival in 1973 and a later version at some other festivals in 1976. Nick acted in a few other films including one documenting his decline from cancer leading up to his death in the late 70s.

After college, I migrated west settling here in the Valley where I leveraged my cinematography and video synthesis experience into developing advanced tools for the arts, having a successful engineering career, and building a long-time technology consulting business.

Fast forward to the Fall of 2011 when Susan Ray, Nick's fourth and final wife having received a substantial grant competed and restored Nick's final film, "We Can't Go Home Again," and created a companion documentary, "Don't Expect Too Much," featuring dozens of my still photos and much of the footage I had shot. The films were shown at the Venice Film Festival and then at the New York Film Festival and have since been released on disc. Many of us gathered some forty years after we first came together on the red carpet at Lincoln Center and at related events for those few days. Susan's documentary proved true to the tumult that surrounded Nick and the flawed nature of the film, serving as a catharsis for many of us. My still photos have appeared in several documentaries, some 8 or 9 books, and countless magazine articles about Nick or the independent film movement of the 70s.

I was lucky in many ways to have stood firm facing the hard decision that Nick predicated and to have been unceremoniously cut loose when I was. Some of the cast and crew never quite exited Nick's orbit even after his death decades before. For me, there were lessons learned of honor and integrity, a distaste for abuses of power in any form, and help realizing I had the freedom to move on and find my own way going forward. My love of cinematography morphed into a life-long pursuit of still photography as I continue to avidly document my life and times.

My other influential mentor Ken Jacobs proved a true teacher and spirit guide. He continues to make innovative films now, well into his eighties and our relationship continues to this day via e-mail and occasional visits to New York. He seems to me the better man, illustrating the value of a dedicated and selfless teacher and these experiences continue to influence my perceptions of this world and my dealings with others.

A Tale of Two Mentors Story Outline:

Graduate high school, settle in, existential angst

Department of Cinema formation, borrow camera & get involved

Finding a home and honing skills

Nicholas Ray comes to campus

Cast and crew experience with Nick

Entourage, the fall, the breakup

Finished studies, Nick moves on

Fast forward to 2011, NY Film Festival

Lessons learned

Ken Jacobs acknowledgement & closing

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Mark Goldstein - A Tale of Two Mentors Performance

May 18, 2016 at The Rebel Lounge in Phoenix

Recording on SoundCloud: <https://soundcloud.com/azstorytellers/mark-goldstein-1>

Internet Movie Database (IMDB):

Nicholas Ray - <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0712947/>

We Can't Go Home Again (1973) - <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0075414/>

Don't Expect Too Much (2011) - <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2043829/>

Susan Ray - <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0713006/>

The Nicholas Ray Foundation - <http://www.nicholasrayfoundation.org/>

Ken Jacobs - <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0414499/>

Mark Goldstein - <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2117029/>

SUNY Binghamton 1971-72 Selected Photos on Flickr:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/mg-irc/albums/72057594135692080>

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